

TO: CITY MANAGER

1999 July 07

FROM: DIRECTOR FINANCE

SUBJECT: FUTURE GOVERNANCE & FUNDING OF 9-1-1 FUNCTION

PURPOSE: To request that Council respond to the GVRD indicating the City's interest in establishing its own call-answer-centre for 9-1-1 calls

RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT Council advise the GVRD by 1999 July 15 of the City's intention to remain with the regional 9-1-1 system.

REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A joint report from the Transportation & Strategic Planning Committee and RAAC on the future governance and funding of the 9-1-1 function presented 1999 June 25 to the GVRD Board of Directors recommended that municipalities be asked to declare, by mid-July, their interest in establishing their own call-answer-centre to serve the 9-1-1 call-answer function.

The alternative to this option is to remain with a region-wide call-answer system.

2.0 BACKGROUND

A technology change installed by BC Tel in June of this year enables it to provide 9-1-1 service throughout the province using a single platform. This eliminates the need for regional districts to purchase their own telephone switches and control equipment to answer and route 9-1-1 calls to public safety dispatch centres.

The introduction of the new technology has caused some member municipalities to consider setting up their own 9-1-1 call-answer centres funded by call-answer levies. Using this approach, calls within a particular area would be routed to a local call-answer centre at which interrogation and dispatch could be integrated with the call-taking.

Such municipalities would continue to be obliged to pay their share of the cost of the regional centre under the Members Tax Requisition unless they had obtained an agreement to do otherwise, consented to by the GVRD Board and other members.

Were BC Tel to administer such call-answer levies it would not do so at the level of an individual municipality; this would mean the establishment of sub-regional call-answer centres comprising at least two municipalities.

Since the notion of sub-regional centres represents a fundamental change to the delivery of 9-1-1 service in the region and has implications for the impending negotiations between the GVRD and E-Comm, the GVRD is seeking from its members indications of interest in providing and/or having access to such centres.

3.0 ISSUES

According to the GVRD report, the benefits offered by the region-wide 9-1-1 system include reliability, quality and redundancy at low cost. Reasons for maintaining the current system also include the following:

- By virtue of its size, the region offers economies of scale with respect to operating efficiency and effectiveness that would be difficult to match at a sub-regional or local level; costs to staff an independent function and to administer the levying of these costs are not well-defined and may well exceed a member's current costs for the regional function.
- Because there is no assurance that the GVRD Board might excuse a member from its obligation to participate in the Members Tax Requisition, there exists the risk of paying twice for the same function.
- A review of the current cost allocation basis which favours relatively lower costs for those municipalities with lower assessed values was recommended in the referenced GVRD report.

Finally,

- Because participation in the GVRD carries with it a sharing of the costs and benefits to all member municipalities, it is not unreasonable to expect that some members might forego savings so that others do not incur those additional costs which would result from a re-structuring of the regional function and re-allocation of costs among fewer member municipalities.

The rationale identified in the GVRD report for a member municipality to establish its own call-answer centre or participate in a sub-regional centre includes the following:

- For a municipality which maintains its own public safety dispatch services the integration of 9-1-1 call taking, interrogation and dispatch could potentially result in lower costs on an individual basis, but a greater overall cost to regional participants.

- For the more remote municipalities within the region there exists the possibility of faster response to local 9-1-1 calls and easy transfer of other 9-1-1 calls to the appropriate call-answer centre.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The case for establishing a local or sub-regional call-answer function is ill-defined and fraught with the potential for unknown costs and risks. Further, the development of such sub-structures would most probably impose a greater cost burden upon member municipalities that elected to remain with the regional function.

It is therefore recommended that the City remain with the regional 9-1-1 system and that Council advise the GVRD accordingly.



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